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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000926

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SUBJECT: FIRST KNOWN TURKISH CYPRIOT GRAVE SITE FOUND IN
SOUTH

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher for reasons 1 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. A bicomunal team working under the Tripartite Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) has discovered human remains thought to be those of Turkish Cypriots missing since the intercommunal clashes of 1963 and 1964. If confirmed by DNA analysis, this would be the first case of a Turkish Cypriot multiple grave being found in the south since the CMP was established in 1981. Financial troubles continue to plague the CMP, which says it needs \$13 million dollars to perform its work for the next three years -- 3 million of which they want up front. The CMP is one of the few successful joint efforts between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, and has an important role to play in healing historical wounds in both communities. Optimists hope it can improve the currently frosty relations between the two sides, thus serving as a catalyst for a resolution to the Cyprus problem. End Summary.

Turkish Cypriot Mass Grave Uncovered in South

¶2. (C) The CMP sent a 12-member bicomunal archaeological and anthropological team composed of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot scientists to carry out exhumations of presumed Turkish Cypriot missing in the southern town of Protaras. (NOTE: The CMP was established in 1981 and has representatives from both communities and the UN. Its mandate is to establish the fate of the approximately 1600 Greek Cypriots missing as a result of the 1974 war, as well the fate of approximately 800 Turkish Cypriots who went missing largely during the intercommunal violence in 1963-4. The CMP is not charged with addressing questions of guilt or criminal wrongdoing, although its mandate has expanded over time to include the recovery of remains and their return to surviving family members.) Although the location has been known for several years as a likely grave-site -- and listed as such with the Committee -- the CMP launched its current "emergency excavations" on the site after determining that a planned construction project might disrupt the area and prevent future successful exhumations. To date, the CMP has listed approximately 185 confirmed burial sites in the north and approximately 40 in the south.

¶3. (C) Turkish Cypriot "MFA" official and Deputy CMP member Ahmet Erdengiz told us that the CMP bicomunal archaeological and anthropological team had discovered 6 pelvic bones and 4 skulls at the bottom of a 30-foot deep abandoned water well on June 5. The remains are thought to be those of Turkish Cypriots missing since the intercommunal clashes of 1963 and 1964. The number of pelvic bones discovered suggests that there were six bodies buried at the site according to Erdengiz, who added that the Turkish Cypriot side had expected there would be seven. DNA test results are expected to confirm the identity of the bodies when and if additional funding is received to continue with the analysis of the remains. Observers expect this site will

be the first case of a Turkish Cypriot multiple grave to be found in the south since the establishment of the CMP.

¶4. (C) The CMP has refrained from public comment on the dig pending formal DNA results, although Erdengiz confided to us that at least one of the victims (a Turkish Cypriot) already had been "preliminarily" identified thanks to a piece of jewelry found on the site with the remains. Erdengiz agreed with the CMP's decision to hold back this information for now, however, and pointed to previous identification "mix-ups" involving stolen or misidentified jewelry found in Greek Cypriot grave sites located in the north.

¶5. (C) Nonetheless, media in both communities have reported extensively on the exhumations of these presumed Turkish Cypriot bodies. Jennifer Wright, the UN official who is the CMP's Acting Third Member pending the July 1 arrival of new appointee Christophe Girod, told us "the Protaras exhumation was not supposed to be a public one," but that journalists had somehow found out and showed up at the site, "forcing CMP to issue a public statement within days of the discovery." She was nonetheless pleased that the press appeared to have taken heed of Greek Cypriot CMP Member Elias Georgiades' June 5 request that the media refrain from further reporting on the issue "so as not to disturb the feelings of the relatives of the missing." Wright added that CMP members jointly agreed to avoid public speculation regarding the number of remains found or their possible identities until the DNA evaluation process had been completed.

Plowing Ahead Despite Budget Worries

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¶6. (C) This exhumation represents one of the three successful digs made by the CMP as a formal bicomunal team since the Committee resumed serious work in late 2005. The previously dormant CMP (inactive largely because of the Denktash regime's uncooperative approach to investigations of the Missing) was frozen at the Committee level for a period prior to August 2004. "From August 2004 until December 2005, the attitude of both sides vis-a-vis the Committee became more positive, with increased talks and agreed-upon confidence building measures to move forward with the exhumations," according to Wright. Since the end of 2005, plans to design and define the actual Project phases, establish who will be working in the scientific lab -- including a team from the UK-based forensics group INFORCE, and determine equipment and personnel needs have been completed, forcing everyone's "nose to the ground," according to Wright. Remains for approximately 90 bodies have been recovered in the "TRNC," according to various newspaper articles. CMP experts expect they will be identified and returned to their families for burial by 2011, contingent on overcoming uncertainties due to the "commingling" of remains, relocation of burial sites, and general obstacles with regard to geological factors, setting a precedence in the 25-year history of the CMP by successfully "closing" a case from among the roughly 2000 missing from both communities.

¶7. (C) Nonetheless, the CMP is plagued with financial problems, and Committee members and staff constantly warn that a lack of money could derail the entire exercise. Previous UN Third Member Pierre Guberan made sporadic and disorganized pleas for money in 2005, when the increased pace of exhumations and investigation placed new and sudden strain on the budget of the historically inactive CMP. Donations from the United Kingdom in the amounts of \$50,000 in 2005 and an additional 45,000 British Pounds earlier this year, along with 100,000 Euros from Germany in March, and \$150,000 each recently pledged from Turkey and Greece have helped ease this strain, but Committee insiders say that this will not be enough to cover what they expect will be further expensive exhumations and DNA tests.

¶18. (C) In a briefing for local diplomats on May 5, Committee members asked for \$13 million over the next three years -- \$3 million of which they said was needed up front in 2006. This money would cover their multi-phase "Project on the Exhumation, Identification, and the Return of Remains of Missing Persons in Cyprus" and allow them to "close" many (although certainly not all) of the cases on their agenda. In a subsequent meeting with us, Erdengiz noted that small donations such as "\$30,000 or \$50,000 would be of no use" because it was "logistically infeasible" to continue the CMP's entire exhumation and identification mission on a hand-to-mouth, shoe-string budget. He strongly encouraged the United States to make a "hefty donation." Both Erdengiz and Wright were quick to claim credit for the CMP's 1998 success of exhuming and identifying American citizen Andreas Kassapis. Kassapis, who was of Greek Cypriot origin, was killed in 1974 at the age of 16 and was one of the five American Citizens' cases submitted to the CMP. (NOTE: The CMP deserves little if any credit for the investigation into Kassapis' disappearance, which was conducted by an independent American team under the auspices of Ambassador Robert Dillon.)

¶19. (C) Wright expressed similar thoughts on the need for CMP funding, but was much more optimistic that donors -- including the communities themselves -- would step forward. Thus far, the "TRNC" has contributed over \$70,000, with the ROC having contributed 200,000, not including additional funding from each side towards investigations, personnel, project preparation, and logistics. She reasoned that because the CMP had made such progress, neither the Greek Cypriot nor Turkish Cypriot leadership could "dash the expectations of their respective communities by stating that there is no further funding to continue." Wright noted that on several occasions, CMP members have argued behind closed doors that it was the duty of the Cypriots, and not the international community, to pay for the CMP. The UN supported this idea, she said, but "only up to a point." Vigorous international donations were important to prevent CMP from falling under the political influence of either side. In order to maintain the Committee's independence, she stated, it was best that the majority of funding be supplied by the international community.

¶10. (C) Based on the assumption that "the money would eventually come from somewhere," Wright told us that the CMP was planning to begin new exhumations during a two-month period beginning in August. These new exhumations would be carefully planned to maintain a balance between recovery of remains from both communities.

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Third Member On His Way

¶11. (C) The newly-appointed Third Member Christophe Girod, whom Wright expects to arrive July 1, may provide new focus and energy to the CMP -- not least in its efforts to raise funds. She noted that one of Girod's first tasks will be "to head to Brussels and lobby the EU for funding." Wright hoped that although the EU has stated it would not have money available for the CMP before 2007, the "high-brow and articulate" Girod would be able to "push the EU bureaucracy" and more generally "raise the prominence of the CMP in the eyes of the international community."

¶12. (C) Meanwhile, press speculation (quietly confirmed to us by sources in the UN and close to the two leaders) that Girod's arrival will serve as the backdrop for the first meeting between President Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot leader Talat since 2004. Talat's advisors have expressed concern that using the CMP as the backdrop for this meeting could politicize the CMP, which has proven to be a comparatively well functioning bicomunal undertaking.

Still, although the details of the meeting have yet to be worked out, both leaders appear committed to meeting on the occasion of Girod's arrival.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) The CMP is one of the few success stories in relations between the two sides, which have been stuck in an unproductive circle of mutual recrimination for two years. Despite inevitable disagreements, Committee members claim to work together in a spirit of pragmatic cooperation, which they hope can serve as an example for how to handle Cyprus settlement questions. Even if this goodwill does not spill over into other arenas, the two leaders appear to have accepted the CMP as a face-saving backdrop against which they can meet for the first time since 2004.

¶14. (C) For this reason, and for the important humanitarian goal of resolving the fate of the missing, Post continues to support the work of the CMP. The USAID-funded, UNDP-administered Action for Cooperation (ACT) project has pledged up to \$100,000 in support of the CMP. We must be cautious as we consider how to reply to the CMP's repeated requests for funding, however. The most recent budget request submitted to potential donors was a heavily padded wish-list that included plans to fund funerals -- complete with a flower basket from the CMP -- for the dead and other line items clearly outside the scope of the CMP's mandate. Therefore, we plan to focus our contributions on tangible items (i.e. a certain number of DNA tests) rather than on general CMP budget support. Furthermore, we will encourage other donors (including the EU and the communities themselves, who have an even greater direct interest in seeing the CMP succeed) to carry some of the load. END COMMENT.
MILLER